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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NDJAMENA 001356

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PMOPS](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [CD](#)
SUBJECT: CHADIAN REBELS LAUNCH OFFENSIVE

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Classified By: Poloff John O'Leary. Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Chadian rebels may have taken the important regional capital of Abeche and appear to have taken Biltine. Looting is reported in Abeche, though the French garrison has secured the airport and is offering sanctuary to civilians. Two major rebel groups appear to be cooperating in a plan to take eastern Chad, and they hope for additional recruits following a success. The UN and some other Western concerns are evacuating or considering the evacuation of their nonessential personnel and/or dependents. Military cooperation is a significant achievement for the rebels, but an important third group appears still to be refusing to join the others. N'Djamena is calm. End summary.

¶2. (C) Emboff visiting eastern regional capital of Abeche (13,49 N; 20,49 E) reported yesterday, 11/24, that two rebel columns had crossed into Chad from Sudan that afternoon. The first column (80 vehicles) was headed toward Goz Beida (12,43 N; 21,25 E) and the second column (40 vehicles) for Am Timam (11,02 N; 20,17 E). Local Chadian authorities reportedly left Goz Beida, and schools and markets there were closed. Humanitarian workers at the nearby refugee camp were standing fast on their compound, providing only essential services to the camp.

¶3. (C) Emboff reported from Abeche this morning (11/25) that artillery and automatic weapons fire could be heard in the vicinity of Abeche. French forces stationed in the town reportedly have secured the airport but closed it until at least Monday, 11/27. Cell phones are not working. A third rebel column reportedly was in the vicinity of Guereda (14,31 N; 22,05 E) at 0800.

¶4. (C) As of 1300 hours local, it appeared that rebels of the United Front for Democracy and Development (UFDD) had taken Abeche. We had several reliable reports that these rebels were looting Chadian government offices and military facilities. "Medecins sans Frontiere" in Abeche told Emboff that 40 wounded rebel fighters and four Chadian National Army (ANT) soldiers were in the Abeche hospital. A source told another Emboff that ANT forces from Abeche were withdrawing toward Oum Hadjar (13,18 N; 19,41 E), approximately 80 KM west of Abeche. Nonetheless, as of 1600, reports indicated that the situation may still be fluid. While it is almost certain that the ANT has left Abeche, it is less certain that the rebels actually control it.

¶5. (C) Multiple sources have told us that rebel units have taken the regional capital of Biltine (14,32 N; 20,55 E).

¶6. (C) Emboff in Abeche at UNHCR compound reports that the refugee camps at Bahai, Goz Beida, and Koukou are calm. Chadian government gendarmes guarding the Djabal refugee camp reportedly fled when they received news of a rebel column to the south, but they remain in the vicinity and are in contact with UNHCR.

¶7. (C) The new French Ambassador, Bruno Foucher, told the Ambassador this morning that 39 French citizens in Abeche had gathered at the Abeche airport under the protection of French troops stationed there. The French garrison has indicated a willingness to take in other civilians, provided they bring their own water and other provisions.

¶8. (C) A well-placed source from the Goran ethnic group (the same group as UFDD leader Mahamat Nouri), told the Ambassador this morning that the rebel aim is to take eastern Chad. Two of the rebel groups, Nouri's UFDD and Mahamat Nour's United Front for Chad (FUC), have joined forces and are moving into Chad in five columns. One has taken Abeche. Another has taken Biltine. Two columns are protecting the Abeche column from ANT forces based along the border in Adre (13,28 N; 22,12 E) and Ade (12,40 N; 21,54 E). The fifth column is headed for the regional capital of Am Timam.

¶9. (C) The Goran source indicated that the goal of the current campaign is to take Abeche and refuel and rearm from government stockpiles located there. The three columns concentrated around Abeche would then leave a holding force in the town and return to the border to take Adre and Ade. The rebels do not plan to attack N'Djamena immediately, although N'Djamena is the ultimate prize.

¶10. (C) According to the Goran source, the rebels expect the GOC to reinforce the town of Mongo (12,11 N; 18,42 E) along the best road between Abeche and N'Djamena, and another Embassy source indicates that the government is doing exactly that. Nouri and Nour expect that success in the East

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will attract volunteers, especially Goran from the Biltine region.

¶11. (C) A UNICEF source reports that the United Nations has recommended evacuation of its dependents, expected Sunday 11/26 or Monday 11/27. ExxonMobil and ENCANA have indicated that they will drawdown nonessential staff. The N'Djamena airport is open, and all regularly scheduled flights are flying. Some seats are available on the Air France flight tonight and tomorrow, but Emboff noted a long line at the reservation/ticket counter.

¶12. (U) N'Djamena is calm, and traffic this morning was normal for a Saturday. The French school is open.

¶13. (U) The EAC met this morning (septel) in response to the situation in the East and will convene again at 1600 hours local. The consular officer distributed a warden message pertaining to today's events, instructing Americans to limit movements and review emergency preparedness. The French Embassy has instructed its citizens to be vigilant and limit movements.

¶14. (C) Comment. The collaboration between the UFDD and the FUC is a significant development in rebel cooperation and will complicate President Deby's efforts to survive the rebellion. Tom Erdmi's SCUD Zaghawa rebel group, however, appears once again to be sitting out the fighting, unable to overcome the enmity between the Goran and the Zaghawa. ANT plans in the face of this rebel advance are unknown at this time. End Comment.

¶15. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
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